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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DURBAN 000027

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SF](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CG](#) [BY](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: XENOPHOBIA IN DURBAN: KZN OFFICIALS AND CIVIL SOCIETY
CONDEMN XENOPHOBIA AND CRITICIZE GOVERNMENT POLICY

REF: A.) PRETORIA 1088, B.) DURBAN 24, C.) DURBAN 26

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CLASSIFIED BY: UDDINS D, POL/ECON Officer, CG DURBAN, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)
Summary:

¶1. (C) Beginning the week of May 19, local police, officials and NGO's confirmed the spread of violence targeting foreign nationals in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. By May 27, while fearful foreign nationals continued to seek safety away from their homes, no new incidents of violence against them were being reported. Officials told us that the situation had been brought under control. As many as 5,000 foreign nationals are estimated to have sought assistance/shelter at local police stations, churches, and diplomatic missions during the past two weeks. Civil society has mobilized in KZN to offer assistance to the displaced and those who fear xenophobic attacks. Municipal and provincial officials condemned the events and called for increased government action. Opposition leaders criticized the government's immigration policy. Businesses also reported assisting their foreign workers and spoke out against the negative impact of xenophobic events on the KZN economy.

End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Local police confirmed the spread of violence targeting foreign nationals from Johannesburg to Durban in South Africa's KZN province starting May 21. No incidents of anti-foreign violence have been confirmed outside of Durban in the rest of the province. As of May 27, while fearful foreign nationals sought safety away from their homes, no new incidents of violence against them had been reported. Ahead of May 27, several separate incidents were reported and confirmed in the past week. A group of men from a local hostel attacked a Nigerian-owned tavern and burnt a car. Two Congolese were attacked at a taxi rank and told to return to their country. A Malawian national was shot while waiting at a bus stop after work. Two Mozambicans were killed and the Mozambican Consul General believed those deaths were related to the xenophobic attacks. Typically, people were going door-to-door telling the Mozambican (and other) citizens to go back to their country and then threatened them.

FOREIGN NATIONALS SEEK ASSISTANCE IN ANTICIPATION OF VIOLENCE

¶3. (SBU) According to numbers released by the eThekweni/Durban Mayor's Office, approximately 1,750 foreign nationals sought assistance/shelter between May 22 and 23. Additional foreign nationals continue to seek assistance/shelter in anticipation of further violence or xenophobic threats. Estimates of the total number have run as high as 5,000. Information released by the mayor's office indicated that most of the displaced foreign nationals were Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, and Tanzanians. Many of the displaced expressed a desire to return to their countries.

¶4. (C) The Mozambican Consul General told us that in Cato Manor and Greenwood Park (both within the eThekweni/Durban municipality) Mozambican citizens had fled to police stations for safety. The Mozambican Consul General confirmed that transport arrangements were made to bus the displaced back to Mozambique. The Mozambican government provided bus service to 361 of its nationals residing in KZN to return home on May 27. During the previous week another 450 had departed via buses organized by the Mozambican government. The Consul General estimated that 32,000 Mozambicans have left South Africa since the violence started in Johannesburg, many of them arranging their own travel home. He also commented on May 29 that the situation seemed to have calmed down.

¶5. (U) A group of foreign nationals from Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo sought assistance at the Consulate on May 27, 28, and 29 (Reftel C). On May 28, The Mercury ran a

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story that landlords in the Durban city center were evicting foreigners from their buildings. The police was unable to confirm this reporting since officers thought that foreigners would not report such incidents to them.

CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILIZES TO OFFER ASSISTANCE

¶6. (U) Civil society groups began organizing themselves on May 20 in anticipation of requests for assistance. The Diakonia Council of Churches has led much of the effort to mobilize the community against xenophobia and to assist the displaced. The NGO community and religious leaders are also working together to discuss policy solutions to the current situation. They would like to be included in the government response in addressing long-term issues such as the status of foreign nationals in South Africa. Interfaith groups are currently providing shelter and other assistance to foreign nationals. Many foreigners, who went to police stations in anticipation of violence, are being transferred to churches and other community groups for shelter. However, Diakonia has expressed concern about its capacity to support additional foreign nationals if the numbers seeking assistance continues to grow. Interfaith groups and the Durban Red Cross are collecting food, clothing, and monetary donations to assist victims of xenophobia. University students are running bread drives to assist civil society groups and the University of KZN sponsored a Forum to address xenophobia on May 29.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE CRITICIZED

17. (SBU) Durban mayor Obed Mlaba and senior provincial officials condemned the events during remarks at the annual African Renaissance Conference on May 23. They expressed 'sadness and chagrin' for the xenophobic attacks that took place in KZN. They also planned to increase engagement in the communities. The African National Congress (ANC) provincial officials did not blame the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) for inciting the violence at this event (Reftel A). The IFP councilor present at the conference said that implications that the IFP was involved were 'wrong and irresponsible.' Some ANC members have shared similar sentiments with Consulate staff. IFP President Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi visited several of the sites affected by xenophobia in Johannesburg and Durban last week.

18. (SBU) One municipal official was quite embarrassed by the slow reaction and lack of engagement of his own party, stating that civil society colleagues were screaming at him to have the municipality get out and do things in certain neighborhoods to ease the tension. It is perceived that the local police has done a good job in responding to the outbreaks of violence, but social workers and councilors have been noticeably absent from the response efforts. Contacts at the local police reported that on several occasions officers have had to go out and purchase food for the displaced. The head of the province's Community Safety Department told us May 29 that city councilor's 'disappeared' when things turned difficult last week and the police had to step in and take on duties that are not really their job.

19. (U) IFP leaders urged the government for more effective border controls and integration of foreign workers. The IFP released a press statement on May 21 criticizing the national government for the lack of a clear immigration policy. The release noted that 'the refugee system, which remains under-funded because of the dictates of the ruling Party, frustrates any rational efforts to control immigration.' According to the IFP, anyone failing to qualify for an immigration permit can just apply for refugee status and the government does not have the capacity to grant and monitor refugee status effectively. 'In the end, asylum seekers are allowed to stay in the country for years, even though they would not qualify for an immigration permit.'

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XENOPHOBIA IMPACTS BUSINESSES AND TOURISM

11. (U) KZN businesses reported being negatively impacted by the threat of xenophobic events. Many employers in the area reported providing foreign employees with accommodations until they felt comfortable returning home. Moyo Restaurant Branch Manager Bianca Erasmus told the press that Moyo's security company was providing daily transport to foreign employees who felt threatened. Erasmus stated that about 30 percent of its waiters at its Ushaka Marine World branch were from other African countries.

12. (U) Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) CEO Ndabo Khoza held a press conference in Durban on May 27 to condemn the xenophobic violence and outline steps to curb the negative impact on tourism in KZN. Khoza noted that Africa is South Africa's most important source of foreign visitors and tourism income. He added that 'in terms of spending per trip by international tourists in 2006, visitors from Mozambique topped the list, each

spending R21,000 (\$2,700).'' Spending by tourists from Angola (\$1,660), India (\$1,500), Nigeria (\$1,480), and U.S. (\$1,430) rounded out the top five list. TKZN Chairman Seshi Chonco said that ''after the domestic tourism market, Africa was the province's most important source of tourists.'' The African market accounts for 67% (6.8 million) of foreign visitors and generates as much as R4 billion (\$519 million) a year in revenues. Fear is that continued violence of threats to foreigners would keep African tourists (many who travel to South Africa from the region for short shopping trips) away from the province. Chonco described ''overnight tourists'' from neighboring towns in Swaziland, Mozambique, and Lesotho as the bread and butter for the KZN border towns and thought the xenophobic incidents put that at risk. Khoza and Chonco hoped to send a positive message to nurture the ''valuable African tourism market.''

¶13. (C) Comment. The spread of xenophobic violence and anti-foreign sentiments has several socio-economic implications for the KZN. Tensions could rise in a region that has suffered from a history of political violence if the ANC and IFP blame political motivations for the flare-up of violence. It could also mutate in a way that brings to the surface latent tensions between the Indian and African communities in the province (another area where there has been a history of sporadic violence). There are no clear estimates of the number of foreign nationals/refugees residing and working in the region. Many foreign nationals, who had the resources to return to their home countries, have already left South Africa. Many foreign nationals who remain do not have the resources to leave or fear returning to unstable home countries. If violence or threats to foreigners increases dramatically, civil society groups in the province will not have the resources to shelter or assist all of the vulnerable foreign nationals. Continued violence could also threaten progress the province has made in attracting foreign investors and in modeling itself as a premier destination for international tourists. End Comment.
YOUNG